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Akal Sahai

GURU GOBIND SINGH'S MISSION

TEJA SINGH

*With All Good Wishes
for
A Happy Gurburab
and
Wishing You Many Happy
Returns.*

Prof. D. Harbham Singh Shan
Principal Project Investigator
U.G.C. Research Project on Sikhism
605, Sector 16, Chandigarh.



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GURU GOBIND SINGH'S MISSION

*For this purpose was I born,
And to spread this religion the Lord appointed
me :*

*“Go and spread righteousness everywhere,
And seize and destroy the wicked and the tyrannical.”*

*For this purpose was I born,
And this let all the virtuous understand
To advance righteousness, to emancipate the
good,*

And to destroy all evil-doers, root and branch.

—Vichitra Natak.

What was the particular contribution of Guru Gobind Singh to the spiritual cause of the world ?

It is a common belief that whatever religious principles Sikhism had to teach were already laid down by the first nine Gurus, that enough had also been done for the spiritual and moral uplift of man, and that nothing very essential was left for Guru Gobind Singh to add to the stock of human goodness. They say that his writings contain no new truth which had not already been revealed, and that to the development of Sikh character he contributed nothing but the spirit of militarism, which in the

modern world has got a very doubtful moral value.

The fighting qualities of a nation are very useful in certain affairs of the world, and as long as the spirit of the brute prevails in human nature, the services of military men will be required now and then to restore the balance of power. But there is no denying the fact that a great change has come over the spirit of men. The teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and Tolstoy have created a great repugnance to war. All thinking people of the world have come to regard war as evil; and a belief is gaining ground that all our disputes should be settled by arbitration, or by mutual talk. The rapid increase in inter-communication and the interchange of goods and ideas is bringing the peoples of different countries close together, and making them so inter-dependent that they cannot think of war without a shudder. 'The proper impulse has been given', and it is only a matter of time when it will be practically impossible for any nation to go to war with its neighbour without antagonizing the whole world. Even now, although war has not ended it is looked upon with the same feeling of disgust as when we see two decent-looking gentlemen falling to fisticuffs in the street. At least there is an appreciable reluctance shown by each party to accept the responsibili-

ty of bringing on war. Even the late Emperor of Germany was anxious to avoid the blame, and declared that the sword had been forced into his hands.

With this change in the feelings of men towards war, their respect for warriors will steadily decrease; and if Guru Gobind Singh was a mere warrior,—as we often show him to be—we cannot save his reputation from waning before the light of the modern civilization. His greatness as of permanent worth can be maintained only if we are able to show that he did something great in developing the whole character of man, and that what he did was and could be done by him alone and nobody else.

Generally, while showing the greatness of the Guru's work, we begin by referring to the tyranny practised by Aurangzeb and to the political hardships borne by people from which the Guru tried to extricate them. We forget that the tyranny practised by certain classes of Indians themselves was no less terrible. If the Mughals were subjecting the people to certain political hardships, the Pandits and Maulvies, where they were concerned, were no less cruel in keeping thousands of their countrymen in a sort of religious bondage. If the political rulers were treating the subject people like so many vermin, the religious leaders were doing no less in looking upon thousands of their

fellow men as untouchables. The political tyranny was discriminate and occasional, but the religious tyranny was indiscriminate and continuous, being practised every day in kitchens, on village wells, in temples and hundreds of other places of mutual resort. It was more heinous than any other crime. Guru Gobind Singh says :

“The sins committed in the name of religion are such that even the greatest sins blush before them.”

All sin was organized. The organization of the political sin was directed by the Mughal Government, and that of the religious sin by the priestly classes. Guru Gobind Singh had to oppose both of these organizations, and for this purpose he had to organize his Sikhs.

The conflict with the political powers was grave and important ; the Guru had to fight with very determined forces of the Mughals and the Hindu Rajas ; but the work done was essentially of local and temporary interest, as it was designed to meet the exigency of a particular time, and was not of that permanent and unique nature, on which the immortal fame of a great hero can safely rest.

The real greatness of Guru Gobind Singh lies elsewhere. It consists in the work of uplift done for the whole mankind. He moulded

the character of man afresh and so intensified it as to enable a few men to do the work of thousands in uprooting evil and promoting the cause of righteousness. He says :

*“For this purpose was I born,
And this let all the virtuous understand :
To advance righteousness, to emancipate the
good
And to destroy all evil-doers, root and branch.”*

He laid the foundation of man's uplift, not on mantras, miracles or mysteries, but on character, as it is character alone, the character already formed—which helps us in moral crises. Life is like a cavalry march. The officer of cavalry on march has to decide very quickly when to turn his men to the right or left. He cannot wait until his men are actually on the brink of a nulla or khud. He must decide long before that. In the same way, when face to face with an evil, we have to decide very quickly. Temptations allow us no time to think. They always come suddenly. When offered a bribe or an insult, we have to decide at once what course of action we are going to take. We cannot *then* consult a religious book or a moral guide. We must decide on the impulse. And this can be done only if virtue has so entered into our disposition that we are habitually drawn towards it, and evil has got no attraction for us. Without securing virtue sufficiently

in character, even the so-called great men have been known to fall an easy prey to temptations. It was for this reason that for the formation of Sikh character the Gurus did not think it sufficient to lay down rules of conduct in a book: they also thought it necessary to take in hand a whole people for a continuous course of schooling in wisdom and experience, spread over many generations, before they could be sure that the people thus trained had acquired a character of their own. This is the reason why in Sikhism there have been ten founders instead of only one.

Before the Sikh Gurus, the leaders of thought had fixed certain grades of salvation according to the different capacities of men, whom they divided into high and low castes. The development of character resulting from this was one-sided. Certain people, belonging to the favoured classes, got developed in them a few good qualities to a very high degree, while others, left to themselves, got degenerate. It was as if a gardener, neglecting to look after all the different kinds of plants entrusted to him, were to bestow all his care on a few chosen ones, which were in bloom, so that he might be able to supply a few flowers every day for his master's table. Guru Gobind Singh did not want to have such a lop-sided growth. He wanted to give opportunities of highest development to all the classes of people.

Some work had already been done in this line. The *Bhagats* or reformers in the Middle Ages had tried to abolish the distinctions between the high-class Hindus and the so called untouchables, by taking into their fold such men as barbers, weavers, shoemakers, etc. But the poison of untouchability still remained there, because the privilege of equality was not extended to men as men, but to those individuals only who had washed off their untouchability with the love of God. Kabir, a weaver and Ravidas, a shoemaker were honoured by kings and high-caste men, but the same privilege was not extended to other weavers and shoe-makers, who were still held as untouchables. Ravidas takes pride in the fact that the love of God had so lifted him out of his caste that even "the superior sort of Brahmins came to bow before him", while the other members of his caste, who were working as shoemakers in the suburbs of Benares, were not so honoured.* Even now the Indian reformers, while reclaiming a member of the so-called untouchable class, think it necessary to subject him to a process of *shuddhi* before taking him into their fold. This ceremony of preliminary purification is not considered necessary in the case of a man coming from a high class. He is initiated directly, as if his humanity was of a superior sort. This term *shuddhi* is a great insult to God's humanity.

*Ravidas in *Rag Malhar*.

The Guru made this improvement on the previous idea that he declared the whole humanity to be one, and that a man was to be honoured, not because he belonged to this or that creed or caste, but because he was a man, an emanation from God, whom God had given the same senses and the same soul as to other men:—

“Recognise all human nature as one.

“All men are the same, although they appear different under different influences.

“The bright and the dark, the ugly and the beautiful, the Hindus and the Muslims, have developed themselves according to the fashions of different countries.”

“All have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body and the same build,—a compound of the same four elements.”

— Akal Ustat.

Such a teaching could not tolerate any idea of caste or untouchability. Man rose in the estimation of man. Even those people who had been considering themselves as the dregs of society, and whose whole generations had lived as grovelling slaves of the so-called higher classes, came to be fired with a new hope and courage to lift themselves as the equals of the best of humanity.

With this came Self-respect. In order to raise the spirit of men from lowness and servility, the Guru removed such obstacles as the demeaning influence of the priestly classes—the Brahmins and the Masands. The charity of the new society was to flow in a new channel. Instead of pampering the old hereditary caste with occasional doles, the Sikhs were to set apart one-tenth of their income regularly to be used for public good. The needs of the Sikhs themselves were to be met out of this common fund.

Once a Brahmin complained to the Guru, “Why are you inviting Sikhs alone to your dinner, leaving us entirely out of your programme?” The Guru replied :

“It is through them that I have gained my experience;

“With their help have I subdued my enemies.

“Through their favour am I exalted ; otherwise there are millions of ordinary men like me whose lives are of no account.

“To serve them, therefore, pleases my heart ; no other service is so dear to my soul.

“All the substance in my house, and my soul and body are at their disposal.”

History affords no other example of a great prophet speaking of his followers in such exalted terms.

This raising of self-respect and the exalted teaching of the Guru inspired the people with a new hope and courage. But that is not sufficient to enable men to resist evil and to persist in positive virtue. The temptation of evil is so strong and the human powers for resisting it are so weak that it is practically impossible for man to fulfil that standard of virtue which is expected of him. It was this consciousness of human weakness which made Baba Farid say :

“The Bride is so weak in herself; the Master so stern in His commands.”

That is, man is endowed with such weak faculties that he stumbles at every step, and yet it is expected of him that :—

“He should always speak the truth, and never tell a lie.”—Farid.

“He should beware even of an unconscious sin.”—Guru Tegh Bahadur.

“He should not step on the bed of another's wife even in dream.”—Guru Gobind Singh.

These commands cannot be fulfilled simply with the strength of knowledge and courage. Knowledge and courage will not go far even in resisting evil. The higher ideal of leading a life of positive virtue and sacrifice is absolutely impossible with such a flimsy equipment. Then what should be done ?

The prophets of the world have given many solutions of this problem. Some believe in the efficacy of Knowledge, others of Austerities, and still others of Alms given in profusion. There are, again, a higher sort of teachers who inculcate the love of some great man as a saviour. What was Guru Gobind Singh's solution ?

The solution offered by Guru Gobind Singh is very simple but wonderful all the same in its efficacy. He saw that, although it was difficult for a man to resist evil and to do good with his own powers, yet if he were primed with another personality possessing dynamic powers, he could acquire a transcendental capacity for the purpose. This personality was to be the Guru's.

THE GURU IN THE SIKH

The Sikh is to fill himself with the Guru, and then he will feel himself linked up with an inexhaustible source of power. A Sikh, a pure-hearted Sikh, who follows the teachings of his

Guru, is a great power in himself ; but when such a Sikh gets into himself the dynamic personality of such a perfect exemplar as Guru Gobind Singh. his powers acquire an infinite reach and he becomes a super-man. He is called " Khalsa", the personification of the Guru himself. "The Khalsa," says the Guru, "is my other self; in him I live and have my being." A single Sikh, a mere believer, is only one ; but the equation changes when he takes Guru Gobind Singh into his embrace. He becomes equal to 'one lakh and a quarter', in the Sikh parlance. This change occurs not only in his physical fitness, but also in his mental and spiritual outlook. His nature is so reinforced in every way that, although hundreds may fall round him, he will resist to the last and never give way. Wherever he stands, he will stand as a garrison of the Lord of Hosts, as a host in himself— a host of one lakh and a quarter. He will keep the Guru's flag always flying. Whenever tempted, he will ask himself, "Can I lower the flag of Guru Gobind Singh ? Can I desert it? I, as Budh Singh or Kahan Singh, can fall but can Guru Gobind Singh in me fail? No, never." This feeling of incorporation with the Guru makes the Sikh strong beyond his ordinary powers, and in times of emergency comes to his rescue long before he can remember anything recorded in history or scripture. Bhai Joga Singh's case is just in point. He was a

terms of such cheerfulness and bravado, as if, for the Sikhs, pain and suffering had lost all meaning. Death was familiarly called an expedition of the Khalsa into the next world. A man with an empty stomach would call himself mad with prosperity. Grams were almonds, and onions were silver pieces, while rupees were nothing but empty crusts. A blind man was called a wide-awake hero, and a half-blind man an argus-eyed lion. A deaf man was said to be a man in the upper storey. A baptized Sikh was called a brother of the Golden Cup, which, by the way was only an iron vessel. To be fined by the community for some fault was called getting one's salary. The big stick was called a lawyer or the store of wisdom; and to speak was to roar.

THE GURU IN THE PANTH

So far we have considered what Guru Gobind Singh did for the Sikhs as individuals. We have seen how he increased their power thousand-fold by filling their personalities with his own. In order to increase their powers immensely more, the Guru made another arrangement. He organized them into Sangats or Holy Assemblies, and put his personality again into them.

Organization is a great power. Individuals get their powers increased merely by organiz-

ing themselves. But there is also a drawback in organization. If it is difficult for men to practise truth as individuals, it becomes a hundred times more difficult for them to practise it as members of an organization. The reason is that organization brings with it power and authority in a measure much beyond the ordinary capacity of men as individuals. This often unbalances their judgments and makes them conceited. Besides, while working in an organization, one has often to modify or suppress one's own ideas in order to accommodate those of others, and in doing this one is liable to compromise not only one's ideas and feelings, but also one's better reason and conscience. To avoid this risk, great prophets of the world have often ignored the corporate life of nations and have confined their teachings to the regulation of private conduct.

It is the glory of Guru Gobind Singh's mission that it included not only the inculcation of private virtues—already taken up by the previous Gurus—but also the organization of a society disciplined in different kinds of virtues required for the service of mankind. The Guru's idea of religion was something more practical than merely mystic. It was to consist of the practice of *Nam* and *Sewa*. To practise *Nam* means to practise the presence of God, by keeping Him ever in our

minds by singing His praises or dwelling on His excellences. This is to be done not only when alone in solitude, but also in public, where worship of the Name is made more impressive by being organized in the form of congregational recitations or singing. The other element is *Sewa* or Service. And here it is where the contribution made by Guru Gobind Singh was most effective.

The ideal of service is that it should be not only liberal, but also efficient and economical ; that is, it should do the greatest good with the least possible means. It should not be wasteful. We do not set up a sledgehammer to crack nuts, or send a whole army to collect revenue. We have to be economical in our efforts, however charitable they may be. For this purpose we have to organize our means ; otherwise there will be much waste, and no good done either. We have often seen, when a house is on fire, how everybody rushes to the spot in confusion, and as their efforts are not organized they do more harm than good. In every work of practical nature, in which more than one person are engaged, it is necessary to resort to organization. As religion, too,—especially a religion like Sikhism whose aim is to serve mankind—belongs to the same category, it requires the organization of its followers as an essential condition of its success. It may not be

necessary in the case of an individualistic religion, wherein the highest aim is to vacate the mind of all desires, or to dream away the whole life in jungles or mountains ; but where religion consists in realizing God mainly through service done within the World, where men have constantly to deal with men to promote each other's good, it is impossible to do without the aim of organization.

Guru Nanak had therefore given two main things with which to work in religion : the Holy Word and the organized Fellowship. * This organized fellowship is called *Sangat*. Every Sikh is supposed to be a member of one or other of such organizations. The first nine Gurus had shown great regard for these *Sangats*, but they were always conducted under the personal guidance of the Gurus themselves or of some local authority deputed by the Gurus. In the course of time, however, they had so advanced in perfecting their sense of responsibility that they could dispense with the need of personal guidance, and were themselves invested with the collective Guruship. In this capacity they were to be called the *Panth*. After Guru Gobind Singh there was to be no longer a personal Guru for them. They were to conduct their spiritual affairs on their own.

* Bhai Gurdas, *Var* i. 42-43.

authority, inspired by the sense that they were the Guru incarnate. In order to inspire themselves with the presence of the Guru, however, they were to keep the Holy Book with them.

Sikhism had thus become an organized movement. Its existence no longer depended on the existence of a particular individual. It could carry itself onward by the force of its own energy. The Mughal Government had tried to extinguish the light of Sikhism by killing a large number of Sikhs, including the sons of Guru Gobind Singh, but the Guru was still unconquered. He rather hurled defiance at the Emperor just at the time when he had lost almost everything in the world, and wrote a reproachful letter to him, calling it a Zafar Nama or an Epistle of Victory. He said therein :—

“What is the use of putting out a few sparks,

“When the flame of fire is burning more fiercely than ever.”

He meant that the work started by the Guru had become a world-wide movement, and therefore it could not be crushed by the defeat or death of a few individuals.

The Guru organized his Sikhs, and made Amrit or baptism the basis of this organization. There was no room left now for any wavering on the borderland. All who wanted to serve humanity through Sikhism must join it seriously as regular members, and receive its baptism as the initial step. All must have the same creed, which should be well-defined and should not be confused with the beliefs and practices of the neighbouring religions. He ordered that—

*“The Khalsa should be distinct from the Hindu and the Muslim.”**

“He who keeps alight the unquenchable torch of truth, and never swerves from the thought of one God ;

“Who has full love and confidence in God ; and does not put his faith, even by mistake, in fasting or the graves of Muslim saints, Hindu crematoriums, or Jogis’ places of sepulchre ;

“Who only recognizes the one God and no pilgrimages, alms, non-destruction of life, penances, or austerities ;

“And in whose heart the light of the Perfect One shines,—he is to be recognized as a pure member of the Khalsa.” †

**Ra'atnama* of Chaupa Singh. †*Swayyas*.

*“The Khalsa is not to believe in the Hindus’ temples, or their idols, their sacred places, their gods and goddesses, their fasts, their modes of worship, their mantras and charms, their Brahmins or their consultations, their vows, their Gayetri, etc.”**

“The Khalsa is to do everything according to the teachings of the Gurus.”†

Such a Khalsa was to embody in himself the highest ideal of manhood, as described by Guru Gobind Singh in his unpublished book, called *Sarb Loh*. Although the Khalsa was designed by the Guru himself, yet the Guru was so charmed by his own creation that he referred to him in the book as his master. The Khalsa was thought fit enough to administer baptism to the Guru, and was consecrated as the Guru incarnate. As a sign that Guru Gobind Singh had placed himself eternally in his Sikhs, it was declared by him that—

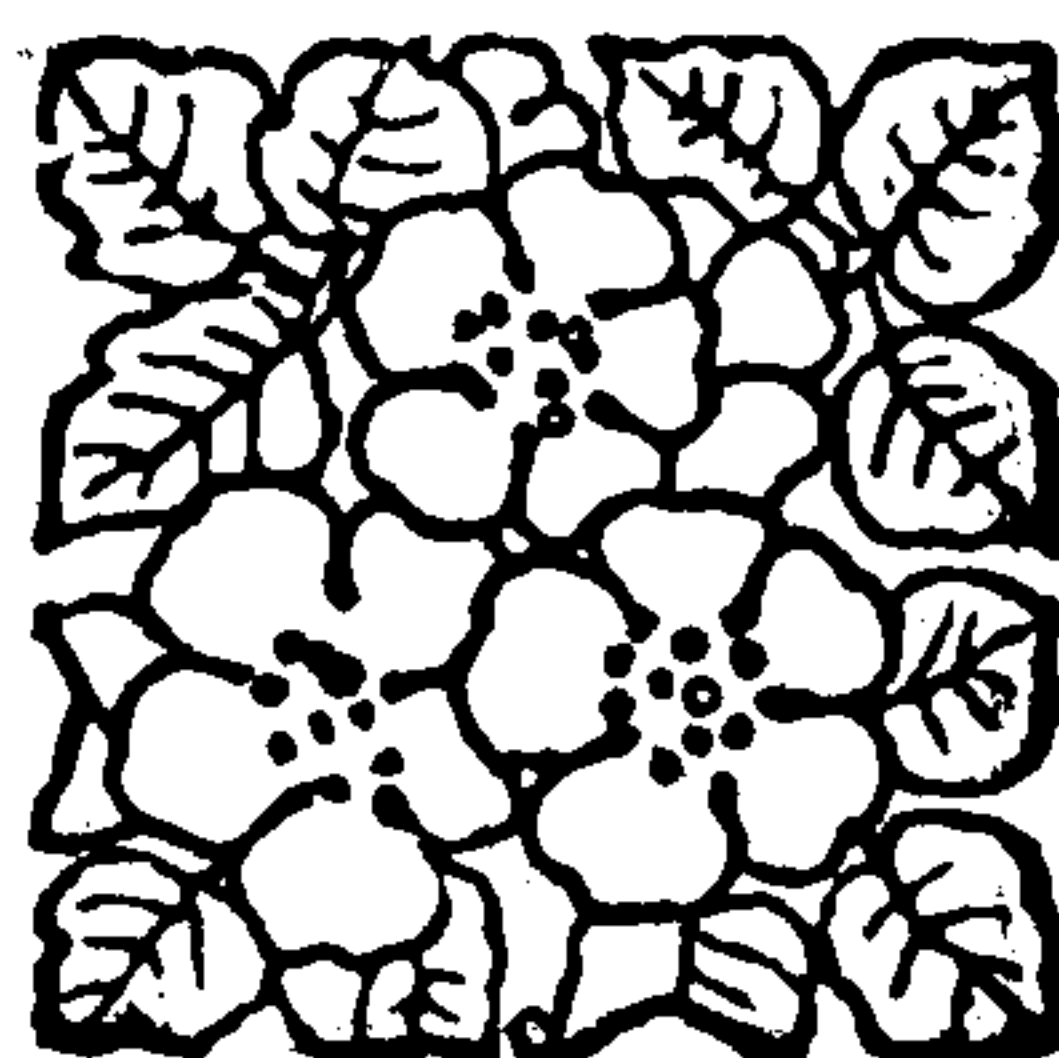
“If anybody wishes to see me, let him go to an assembly of Sikhs, and approach them with faith and reverence; he will surely see me among them.” Prem Sumarag.

In the ranks of the Khalsa, all were equal, the lowest with the highest, in race as in creed,

* *Swayyas*. † *Rahatnama* of Daya Singh.

in political rights as in religious hopes. Women were to be baptized in the same way as men, and were to enjoy the same rights. All questions, affecting the welfare of the whole community, were to be referred to the *Sangats*, which would decide them in the form of resolutions called *Gurmattas*. A *Gurmatta* duly passed was supposed to have received the sanction of the Guru, and any attempt made afterwards to go back on it or to subvert it was taken as a sacrilegious act.

This constitution, in which the presence of the Guru is believed to be all along operative, has not only kept the Sikhs together in hard times, but has also given them a power much beyond their numerical strength. With it they have performed exploits in history which are hardly less than miracles. To think of Sikhism without this tremendous work done by Guru Gobind Singh is to fall far short in understanding it, and to accept Sikhism without accepting Guru Gobind Singh's mission is to deny oneself all the privileges and powers which his personal contact is capable of bestowing on one's frail humanity.



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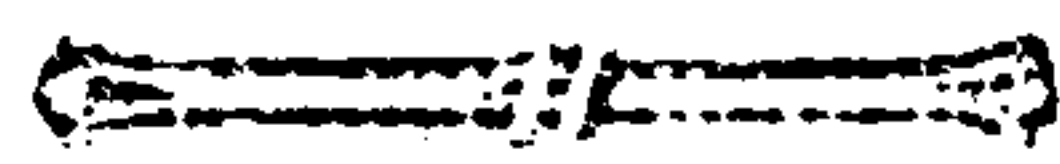
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